

Japan's Transformation Since Her Hermit Days

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PROVERBS are the mirrors of experience. In these we can "see ourselves as others see us." The Japanese have a gallery of mirrors in which they have truthfully seen themselves, first to their chagrin, then to their merri-ment, and finally to their improvement. They used to laugh at both "The frog in the well that knows not the great ocean," and "The hermit in the market place." To-day the former "frog" travels in all oceans, and the quondam "hermit" is in all market places. In both cases he speaks Japanese.

"Japan will never be content with her own ideas," said a bright-eyed subject of the Mikado in New York on the day before the first twentieth century birthday of our country. He was one of several commissioners that were making the tour of the world for purposes of inquiry and information.

Well, it does seem wonderful to find the hermit nation of less than a half



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century ago standing shoulder to shoulder with the United States and Great Britain in the world politics of the far East. Indeed, Japan has been the chief agent in moving the center of history from the Mediterranean to the Pacific. Japan is comrade of the English-speaking nations. Her most eager politicians are strenuous to secure, if possible, the British rather than the Prussian system of national government. Her people like American methods of taxation and representation. Every year the ideals of Christian nations are molding and reshaping the social life of Japan.

Steadily the leaven hid is working, and Japan looks wonderfully more like a Christian nation, even though vastly far as yet away from the perfect ideal, than was apparent twenty or even ten years ago.

The rose smells just as sweet, even if in the garden the single plant, the clumps of bushes, and the towering climbers rich in masses of beauty and perfume, have not the name, or names, familiar to us. Though the Mikado ascribes all national progress to the virtues of his divine ancestors, though native patriots even fanatically eager to avoid the term Christian, attribute all power, change and betterment to the Japanese genius or to civilization, what odds? What if all our missionaries and their work, the prayers and gifts and genuine altruism of Christ's followers, be ignored? Can we not stretch a hand across the centuries and be glad with Paul? "What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." If the harvest ripen, why shall we grieve if the sower be unknown? Has it not been well said of our civilization that it is "largely the product of the forgotten"? The English landscape is a joy to the eye. "To whom are Englishmen to-day indebted for bringing the primeval forest into this condition? To more than fifty generations of forgotten toilers. It is largely the magnificent gift to the present of dead and unremembered men." So may we say concerning results in that gospel enterprise whose field is not only Japan but the world.



THE EMPRESS OF JAPAN

Yet the Japanese themselves are beginning to acknowledge the debt they owe to Americans. Years ago, when the writer uttered his belief that the Japanese would themselves yet rear to Commodore M. C. Perry a monument in recognition of the blessings he brought them, the assertion was greeted with a hearty laugh, and in some quarters referred to with jeers. Yet to-day there stands at Kurihama, fronting the Bay of Yedo, in the midst of "Perry Park," a monument of Sendai stone, chiseled deep with a grateful inscription of acknowledgment from the pen of

Japan's premier, Marquis Ito. In honor of the event of July 9, 1853, besides oratory and poetry of the celebration, the steel battleships of Japan and a double-turreted war vessel of the United States Navy added in 1901 their

diapason in fraternal and memorial salutes. Rear Admiral L. A. Beardslee, once a midshipman on a frigate in Perry's peaceful armada, was there, besides a throng of our own countrymen and high officers of state. This is what the Japanese themselves say :—

“This visit of Commodore Perry was the turning of the key which opened the doors of the Japanese Empire to friendly intercourse with the United States, and subsequently to the rest of the nations on similar terms; and may in truth be regarded as the most memorable event in our annals: an event which paved the way for and accelerated the introduction of a new order of things; an event that enabled our country to enter upon the unprecedented era of national ascendancy in which we are now living.”

Yet what has been Japan's line of progress? What the order of events? Let us inquire.

Taking our stand in imagination at Kurihama in 1854, let us look at the social and moral conditions armed now with the X-ray of historical research, and do the Japanese full justice apart from foreign and Christian bias. Let us acknowledge first of all, there was a despotism at Yedo which gave priestcraft, stupid officialdom, reactionary mediocrity, and all the Devil's forces of the exclusion of ideas and the inclusion of the people, their full

opportunity, while every principle of progress, every hope of imprisoned or murdered reformer and all native possibilities of improvement were sternly repressed. Let us frankly confess that the Japanese genius and hereditary forces, in the light of nature, would of themselves have done much to re-create and improve. Let us even imagine, if we can, that possibly without foreign influences or Christianity, the condition of the population (kept immorally stationary for a hundred years), the slavery of woman in harlotry, the rule of the sword, the elaborate oppression of the people, the existence of a pariah (*eta*) class, the low state of woman, kept so by religious dogma, the ravages of unnatural disease, the disastrous social heresies, might have been profoundly modified for the better. Yet after making full allowance for interior potencies unfertilized from without, we declare it to be impossible, with them alone in view, to account for the Japan of to-day, or even as much as half of her moral potency. Without Christian civilization, and more particularly of active Christian effort, by the men and women borne from Christendom to Japan by the gales of prayer and working there sustained by the Holy Spirit and the praying and giving Christians at home, there would have been no such Japan as we see to-day, with a promise and potency of moral progress almost equal to her advance in things material.

Without one Christian man on the soil, the clans most hostile to the Yedo government might have upset the old order of things political, and given unity and a new outlook to the nation, but, personally, we doubt it. They might, in Japanese phrase, have changed the mats but not the floor. As matter of simple fact, it was Christianity that gave Japan new foundations.

Let us recall and remember. At Nagasaki, in 1858, an American missionary layman from China and interpreter to Commodore Perry, S. Wells Williams, the U. S. naval chaplain Henry Wood, with Rev. E. W. Syle, sailors' chaplain at Shanghai, all American citizens, heard officially that the Japanese were "ready to allow foreigners all trading privileges, if a way could be found to keep opium and Christianity out of the country." Thereupon "we three," one of them writes, "agreed to write home for missionaries for Japan who could teach the people what true Christianity was." There is a kind of Christianity that has plenty of ecclesiastical opium in it. There is another which, believing in Christ alone as the Great Physician, is the giver of health drug-free. As the direct result of that first Protestant missionary conference in Japan, four Christian men of light and leading reached Japan in 1859. As we now discern them in the perspective of history, they became, all unconsciously to themselves, and for the space of ten

years almost alone in their work, a committee for the making of a new Japan. They trained up hundreds of the young men who have since become the statesmen, physicians, men of science and introducers of new and better things, "beginners of a better time," re-creators of the nation. The pupils of these four missionaries were not indeed a majority of the overturners of the old *regime*, not iconoclasts merely; but we can say without fear of successful challenge, that they did form a majority of the men most influential in the constructive work required in the new state.

After 1869 these four influential men, Verbeck, Brown, Hepburn, Williams, were no longer alone. The Revolution, or the Restoration, having become a fixed fact, and the Mikado, now sole executive, having taken oath to reform the nation on modern principles, the missionaries of the American Board, men and women, poured into the country. With other fellow-workers, they also began the training of hundreds, yes, thousands, of boys and young men in self-government, in parliamentary usage, in the rudiments of social order, making their churches, Sunday schools and general meetings institutes for self-support and self-control, so necessary in a country wherein old absolutism and the reign of the sword were to make way for enlightened government. These men and women from Christian America laid

down the principles for the re-making of the Japanese, body, soul, spirit, home and society. Without the Christian missionaries, we believe it would have been absolutely impossible for Japan to have gained anything like the rate of progress which she has been for years enjoying.

For consider, for example, the condition of native womanhood—one half of the Japanese—in 1853. From empress to eta, the status of woman was unspeakably lower than that of to-day. To have suggested then that even the Mikado's wife was an empress in the Occidental sense of the term, would have angered a Japanese. An imperial marriage had no special sanction, being outwardly merely an item in the Government gazette, and morally of no meaning in the harem. In the lower ranks the customs in regard to women were largely those of barbarism, even as they are so largely yet—one divorce to every three marriages, and conjugal union too often only partnership over a tub of rice. Woman's status and possibilities were summed up in "the three obediences." Relatively, poor women were more on an equality with their lords and masters than their sisters socially higher. The more wealth and rank, the more were women treated like dolls and babies. When heirs or more progeny were desired, and often when the man's mere whim made law, the wife had few rights which a husband was

bound to respect. Women could be called in, hired as servants, and after their duties of motherhood and nursing were over, were discharged, being allowed to know no more of their offspring than the forgetful brutes around them. No wonder the numerical distributive term *hiki* was employed, as I have heard it, for oxen, men, and women, or any and all draught animals and beasts of burden. The laws governing the myriads of women shut up from childhood in the brothel quarters or settlements in every large city were, in many of the most vital particulars, exactly like those of actual slavery. The foreign and Christian notions about love and reverence toward woman were hooted at as absurd. To love one's wife "as Christ also loved the church," has given many a Japanese Christian learning to follow the Master deep searchings of heart, until he might say to such, winning back many of the wavering, "Will ye also go away?" Happily the victories of the conquering Christ in this arena of the heart are many.

To-day those who actually saw the old pagan situation, who know it from having lived in it, and who can look through the spectacles of research, can hardly believe their own eyes. "What hath God wrought?" was the exclamation, in 1872, of Townsend Harris, our first envoy in Japan from 1855 to 1860. He thought it wonderful that one native Christian church was

organized. To-day there are many hundreds with myriads of worshipers. I hold in my hands, as I dictate, two slender volumes entitled "The Civil Code of Japan," containing the text in Japanese, and translation into English of the new laws, which with the other codes, when passed by the Imperial Diet, won Japan's recognition as equal in the sisterhood of nations. This, with the constitution, now nearly fifteen years old, came only after terrific struggles, and both are victories of Him who leadeth the nations, whose name is the Word of God. Both of these great political instruments cut directly across the grain of those hoary systems which made the state all, the individual a cipher, the family everything, the individual nothing, against systems which were what they were, with all their social horrors, because founded on the idea of impersonality.

The educated and consecrated womanhood of Japan is a new and permanent force. There are no more pariahs. The law prevents a son of a concubine from inheriting property, title or rank, and this from the lowest nobleman up to the heir to the throne. Only the son of the true wife can be the legal heir. In the recent marriage of the crown prince and the birth in the home, and not in the herd, of an heir to the throne we read a happy augury for the future. Hereafter there are to be no legal concubines, even

to an emperor. Throughout the empire not only the Christian women are banding together, but eloquent lecturers and writers, pupils of the missionaries, are urging the cause of one morality for both sexes.

Japanese civilization lacked as its corner stone the glorious ideas of the personality of God and the individuality of man. These ideas are now,—having been introduced, enforced, and illustrated by the Christian missionaries,—as steadily as leaven in meal, transforming the Japanese people. All the silly Chauvinism, all the hysterical and false patriotism, all the owls and the bats that thrive in the darkness of insular ignorance and Oriental conceit, cannot ultimately hinder the growth of Christian Japan. In the Sunrise Empire we have now the new home, the new family, the new patriot, the new book, the new political and social principles, the new faith based on the idea of God as spirit seeking spiritual worshipers, upon the idea of a loving Father to whom his Japanese children are very dear. As we write, the news of the spiritual revival in the cities and the national capital, bringing hundreds of new-born souls into the Master's kingdom, seems to waft Amen!

Banzai! Banzai! (ten thousand generations) to the new state in the new Asia.